

Evolving Workplace

EXTERNAL RESEARCH – OVERVIEW — DECEMBER 2021



The uncertainty about the evolving workplace and ‘what it will look like’ is a major challenge we are trying to address now. And because the external factors driving this uncertainty – the pandemic, social change, technology integration are not going away - this uncertainty is not likely to diminish any time soon.

Everyone involved in defining the evolving workplace are researching different factors that will help define the evolving workplace, addressing human factors that make completing these changes ‘easier’ and more effective, and what the outcomes may be. Several of these factors include:

1. Recognizing why this continuous change and uncertainty is has a negative impact on people – like burnout – and what may be done to alleviate this.
2. Understanding what ‘flexibility’ means to leadership and employees and how different generations think about and may be impacted by this new flexibility.
3. The crucial importance of leadership focusing on their organization’s culture and how it may enable – or get in the way of – addressing changes associated with the evolving workplace.
4. How work itself is evolving.
5. The value of engaging employees in any ‘return to the workplace’ planning as well as defining any changes to the workplace they will be returning to.

We have included in this document several articles that discuss and share research on these different factors.

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[Working Less Is a Matter of Life and Death](#)

The New York Times, May 29, 2021

A [new study](#) by the World Health Organization and the International Labor Organization says that working 55 or more hours a week is a “serious health hazard.” It estimates that long working hours led to 745,000 deaths worldwide in 2016, a 29 percent increase over 2000. Japan even has an officially recognized term - “karoshi” – that translated to ‘death by overwork’.

During the pandemic, US workers on average worked 3 more hours per day. Working extra hours is almost core to the American business culture; we work longer hours, take less vacation time and sick leave. In fact, among the 30 top industrialized countries, the United States remains proudly alone as the [“no-vacation nation.”](#)



[Making Hybrid Work More Permanent? Set Some Ground Rules](#)

Matt Cain, Gartner, May 21, 2021

Gartner has identified three ‘common sense’ approaches to combat anxiety and boost unity and efficiency for hybrid and remote teams.

Team unity and health: Managers that are empathetic and approachable will improve the team’s interpersonal unity. Managers need to demonstrate new behaviors that will improve productivity – i.e., schedule flexibility.

Time management and team coordination: Focus on outcomes, not inputs. This reinforces that team members’ participation is judged by contribution, not location; in office employees will not get preferential treatment.

Tools and equipment: Provide the appropriate tools for the work team members need to perform and provide the required training to ensure workers’ proficiency. Workers need to understand they are responsible for maintaining the knowledge and proficient use of technology.

There are also common-sense guidelines – workers set their schedules, dress code flexibility, limiting meeting frequency – that will also improve the effectiveness of hybrid work.

Note: Click on the article title to open a copy of the research report/article.

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[Our Brains Were Not Built for This Much Uncertainty](#)

Heidi Grant and Tal Goldhamer, HBR, September 22, 2021

Prior to the pandemic, there was already a high level on uncertainty about work driven by factors like changing client needs, the impacts of technology, and globalization. As leadership builds strategies to address these changes, it is crucial that they understand and take into consideration that ‘the *human brain was not built for this.*’

It’s a fairly common understanding that, when faced with the unknown and uncertainty, the brain automatically goes into ‘fight or flight’ mode. But it also decreases in motivation, focus, agility, cooperative behavior, self-control, sense of purpose and meaning, and overall well-being. And it makes basic tasks associated with work – recalling ideas from memory or holding multiple thoughts in order to solve specific problems.

There has been a lot of research into how the brain functions, and from that research are recommendations for helping the brain manage the uncertainty, including:

- Setting expectations with realistic optimism: Realistic optimism means believing that everything is going to ‘work out just fine’, while accepting that it may be difficult at times.:
- Lifting to bigger-picture thinking: This requires focusing on ‘the big picture’ as opposed to diving into the weeds. Psychologists refer to this as [levels of construal](#)..
- Embracing candor: This involves ‘making it ok’ to honestly share what’s working and what’s not working. Your colleagues know when you’re not sharing everything. This is not always easy, but [working in an environment where it is not allowed is even more damaging](#).

Note: Click on the article title to open a copy of the research report/article.

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[Will Relaxed Rules About Hybrid Work Improve Productivity and Performance?](#)

MIT SMR Strategy Forum, October 27, 2021

MIT asked their panel of strategy experts worldwide to address this issue as part of the MIT SMR Strategy Forum. The summarized responses are:

Relaxing rules around employee presence in the office will improve employee productivity and organizational performance.	
Strongly Agree	9.4%
Agree	37.5%
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	37.5%
Disagree	15.6%
Strongly Disagree	0%



[The Future of Flexibility at Work](#)

Ellen Ernst Kossek, Patricia Gettings, and Kaumudi Misra, HBR. September 28, 2021

What does true flexibility look like? Most organizations approach it in one of two ways: as an ad-hoc work-life accommodation available upon request, or as giving people permission to get their work done on their own schedule, as long as they're available to answer emails or put out fires 24/7. Neither approach is sustainable over the long term.

Based on their long-term research, the authors believe that true flexibility aligns employers and employees to achieve mutual gain in meeting both performance and work-life needs. It is a means to compete in the market over the long term, and it gives employees a say and some choice in how flexibility is implemented on their teams and in their organizations.

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[Manage Your Emotional Culture: Most leaders focus on how employees think and behave—but feelings matter just as much.](#)

Sigal Barsade and Olivia A. O’Neill, HBR, January – February 2016

In our research over the past decade, we have found that emotional culture influences employee satisfaction, burnout, teamwork, and even hard measures such as financial performance and absenteeism. Countless empirical studies show the significant impact of emotions on how people perform on tasks, how engaged and creative they are, how committed they are to their organizations, and how they make decisions. Positive emotions are consistently associated with better performance, quality, and customer service—this holds true across roles and industries and at various organizational levels. On the flip side (with certain short-term exceptions), negative emotions such as group anger, sadness, fear, and the like usually lead to negative outcomes, including poor performance and high turnover.



[Why Every Executive Should Be Focusing On Culture Change Now.](#)

Rose Hollister, Kathryn Tecosky, Michael Watkins, and Cindy Wolpert, MIT Sloan, August 10, 2021

To make transformation a reality in their businesses post-pandemic, leaders must build a strong culture to support it. As the global community emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, business leaders must lay the foundation for their organizations to thrive in a very different world. The pandemic accelerated three interlinked types of transformation affecting every industry:

1. the adoption of digital technologies,
2. the development of new business models,
3. the implementation of new ways of working.

A recent [study by Boston Consulting Group](#) found that companies that focused on culture were five times more likely to achieve breakthrough results in their digital transformation initiatives than those that didn’t.

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[4 Modes of Collaboration Are Key to Success in Hybrid Work](#)

Mary Baker, Gartner, June 24, 2021

Hybrid work environments provide new ways for employees to collaborate productively, but leaders must intentionally create those opportunities. Alexia Cambon, Director, Research, Gartner states that “Leaders must empower employees to collaborate more intentionally. Our research shows that teams of knowledge workers who collaborate intentionally are nearly three times more likely to achieve high team innovation than teams that do not use an intentional approach.”

Organizations must focus on both location (in the office, remote) and timespend (synchronous, asynchronous). This approach yields four work modes that organizations must invest equally in if they are to succeed in the hybrid environment:

1. Working together, together: when teams are collocated, contributing to meetings in a shared space.
2. Working together, apart: when teams are distributed, but participating in virtual meetings.
3. Working alone, together: when teams are in shared spaces, but not working at the same time.
4. Working alone, apart: when teams are distributed, and individuals are conducting deep focus work.



[The Top 10 Findings on Resilience and Engagement](#)

MIT Sloane, Marcus Buckingham

March 01, 2021

From the ADP Research Institute, here are the 10 most intriguing discoveries from a global study of resilience and engagement. These are findings that will help leadership in building engagement in their organizations.

1. Trust is everything.
2. One is the loneliest number.
3. Office space isn't essential.
4. It's good to be in tech.
5. Nurses and teachers are suffering the most.
6. The unknown is scarier than change.
7. The honeymoon (effect) is over.
8. Members of Gen Z are no less resilient than their elders.
9. Relationships boost resilience.
10. Resilience and engagement levels rise with your role.

Some of these factors are consistent with core components of change management that Allsteel has been sharing for several years.

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[How Younger Workers' Preferences and Workstyles Will Define the Future Workplace](#)

Janet Pogue McLaurin, Gensler, October 7, 2021

The workforce is changing rapidly, not only because of the ongoing generational shifts, but also as a result of the 'Great Resignation.' Younger workers are becoming the majority of the workplace quicker than expected, and their requirements and preferences will need to be addressed more consistently.

Some key findings Gensler's [2021 Workplace Survey](#) include:

- Younger generations value the office differently: They identified "maximizing individual productivity," and "being visible to be promoted" as primary reasons to come to the office.
- Flexibility is preferred over assigned desks: Approximately 70% of Gen Z, Millennials, and Gen X respondents prefer primarily working remotely, but when they come into the office, 30% prefer working in the office at a desk not shared with others if they are not working in a team space.
- Third places are an important part of the new workplace ecosystem: Younger generations are three times more likely to prefer third places to reflect or conceptualize than Boomers, who overwhelmingly prefer home.
- Creating an empowered work experience: With the ongoing war for talent, organizations need to focus on creating an empowered work experience based on choice and flexibility that is inclusive; one that celebrates how we each work and what we all need to win the hearts, souls, and minds of our people.
- The growing importance of collaboration, and how to ensure it is equitable and inclusive for workers regardless of their location.

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[Forget Flexibility. Your Employees Want Autonomy.](#)

Holger Reisinger, Dane Fetterer, HBR, October 29, 2021

Autonomy is a key driver of human motivation, performance, and fulfillment, and in the context of hybrid working, it is directly correlated to the amount of flexibility employees have to define their work arrangement. By turning the dial on autonomy up or down, employee flexibility increases or decreases, respectively.

This HBR study found that 57% of respondents wanted more ‘flexibility’ in where and when they work. It also found that 61% of the respondent want that flexibility on the condition that they are able to exercise it in a way that best fits them. In other words, they want autonomy, not mandates. And, based on American psychologists Richard Ryan’s and Edward Deci’s 1985 ‘self-determination theory, one’s autonomous motivation for personal, psychological growth is the foundational catalyst of human success and fulfillment.

The HBR study helped define 5 categories of flexibility and autonomy:

- Low autonomy, low flexibility: I am mandated to be in the office full time.
- Low autonomy, medium flexibility: I work from both the home and the office, but my organization tells me which days to be in which place (e.g., the marketing department is required in the office on Monday and Wednesday, but must work remotely Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday).
- Medium autonomy, medium flexibility: I can work from multiple locations, but with a minimum number of days required in office each week.
- Medium autonomy, high flexibility: I am mandated to work remotely full time but can choose where I want to work.
- High autonomy, high flexibility: I can work wherever, whenever, with full access to my organization’s office space.

Note: Click on the article title to open a copy of the research report/article.

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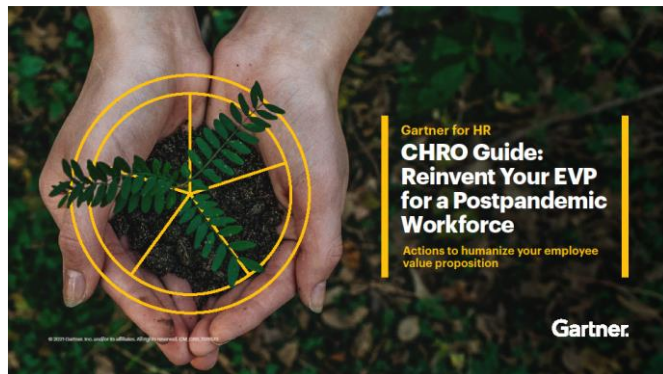


Redesigning Work for a Hybrid Future

Alexia Cambon, Graham Waller, Gartner, August 2021

Human-centric work design, characterized by flexibility and empathy, makes employees feel more empowered, and increases their productivity and engagement. It also enables organizations to be more responsive to customer demand, more resilient to disruptions and more productive. It can also reduce a range of costs — from real estate and travel to employee attrition.

In short, the human-centric approach can be a win-win for employees and organizations, but it requires executives to commit to leveraging a hybrid workforce strategy. For many, that means shedding some old assumptions and dispelling myths about what hybrid work models mean and do.



CHRO Guide: Reinvent Your EVP for a Postpandemic Workforce: Actions to humanize you employee value proposition.

Gartner, Fall 2021

The post pandemic workplace requires that organizations reinvent the EVP (Employee Value proposition) for Higher Impact; this new The postpandemic workplace requires a value proposition based on new management principles, including:

1. Who does the work: this is defined around people, not workers
2. Where work fits: Designed to provide an exceptional life experience, not just employee experience
3. Why employees work for us: Delivering features and feelings that match employee needs, not just offering features

Gartner refers to this as the 'Human Deal'. And their research shows that employing this new approach will positively impact employee engagement and performance. And loyalty, all of which support improved organizational performance

Note These articles may be accessed by clicking on the image to the left of the summary.

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[Returning Employees to an Office? Consider the Talent Risks](#)

Swetha Venkataramani, Gartner, June 23, 2021

As more organizations explore returning to work after covid vaccinations are more widely distributed, executive leaders must consider how this presents significant risks to retention, performance, and DEI; without these considerations, recruiting and retention could be impacted negatively.

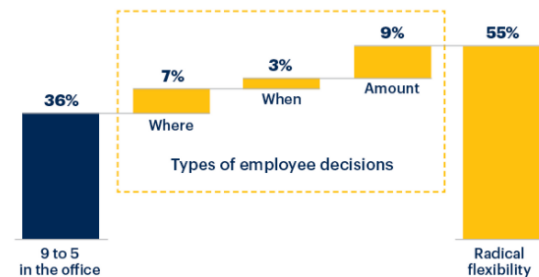
In the long term, most organizations will move to a hybrid work arrangement. To facilitate this, In the short term, then, HR leaders will need to work with executive leaders on key actions:

1. Moving from a location-centric to a human-centric hybrid strategy.
2. Establish the purpose or role of on-site locations.
3. Partner with IT and real estate to deliver the value proposition of the on-site location.

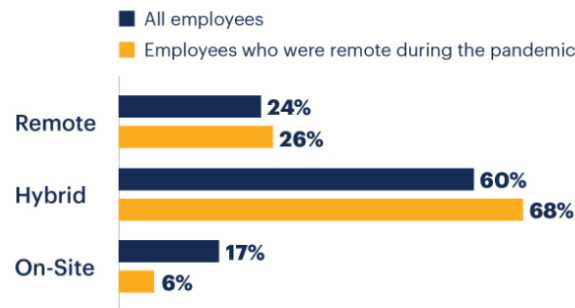
These chart below include data focusing on 3 areas that organization need to address to ensure their recruiting and retentions plans are effective.

Flexibility Fuels Employee Performance

Percentage of high performers



Employee Work Preferences

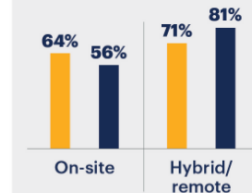


Employees With Disabilities Thrive in Hybrid World

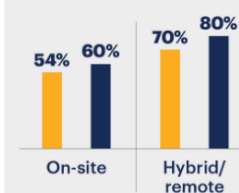
Do you have an impairment or medical condition that disrupts life activities?

■ Yes ■ No

Q: "My team ensures all team members feel equally heard and respected."
Percentage of knowledge workers that agree



Q: "My manager aims to provide equal access to their time to all their direct reports."
Percentage of knowledge workers that agree



Note: Click on the article title to open a copy of the research report/article.